

Jože Šubic

PIGGY BANK FOR THE ARTIST

29 September–21 October 2023

artKIT

With his new exhibition, Jože Šubic not only symbolically, but also actually completes an author's opus. For each of his exhibitions, he made a unique *Piggy bank for the artist* out of ceramics and attached it as an extra artefact to collect voluntary contributions for a visit, a catalog or something like that.

Now he decided to break them open and check what was inside them and display them as an autonomous installation. From a secondary role in which many people did not notice them, they are coming to the fore. We experience them as something new and as a reminiscence, retrospective, recapitulation of his artistic journey. At the same time, with their abstract message, in which there is also some (self)irony, but even more reality, it places the artist in a business environment and deals with the attitude that society has towards him and art itself. It can also be interpreted as mischievous, since the piggy bank exists for most people only as a memory of childhood, but in the debris of life, such a gesture rings more alarming and sounds like a ballad.

And again, as in previous years, Jože Šubic's exhibition *Piggy bank for the artist* is being established as an installation, a rounded or assembled environment, which after the exhibitions *Nine stations of your taste* (2011), *Who here holds water?* (2012), *Glorious Twelfth* (2020) fill sixteen ceramic reservoirs well. This time, none of them will be seen as additional, parallel, infiltrated into their collecting function, as they are transformed into a central art object and as such are 'useless', without desires, needs and obligations, and therefore for viewing and reflection. The end of accepting donations as the final act of reckoning with the system of fine or visual art is accompanied by a video produced by *Film Factory Maribor* with a performative action of breaking the piggy banks as a final solution to the artist's statement and his commercial activity.

But there were more piggy banks, eighteen. The first one, a metal one, was taken away by someone who we watched in the back when he was running away from the opening of Šubič's exhibition *FAK* in KIBLA in 2003. After another one was not returned to him from the exhibition in the *Mercator Gallery* in Ljubljana in 2015, it was not among the other works of art. so that there are sixteen left which are on display. Of course, we ask honest owners or finders to lend them to us for the duration of the exhibition and maybe we can see them. After all, the piggy bank is also a symbol of something called Schrödinger's cat, which appears in a seemingly paradoxical thought experiment in quantum mechanics. A complex and self-contradictory message can be interpreted very simply, that we cannot know what is in the box in which the cat is confined until we open it.

This is how Jože Šubic has been even after 20 years, since he has been setting up piggy banks at solo exhibitions and guessing what is inside, or how much the audience contributed and donated to him at the exhibitions and smashed them. He knocked with the tools he normally uses to process his creations. He faced reality and dismantled it. This act should not

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be understood as Luddism, but above all as a curiosity. And a decision that is also tied to his creativity and a certain, current period of his life. Therefore, the gesture is conceptual at the same time, since he designed the piggy banks so that he will make them and break them when he retires. The wreckage together with the content can be perceived as a symbol of someone's artistic journey and as a summary and at the same time a disclosure of the artist's situation to the public. Otherwise, we think, assume, know what the state of art is, but Jože Šubic serves us facti bruti, cruel facts.

The alms received, which this campaign reveals, are even more miserable than we imagine and consequently 'justifies' the brutal act of destroying works of art. Although the question may arise as to how much the piggy banks are works of art, since they were a kind of parallel to Šubič's conceptually designed and content-rounded gallery installations, which also had their own useful value, but in their role were primarily a provocative and open act, not only a test of the system, which defends the market, but also a test of human relations and solidarity, which is not just for God's sake. Therefore, we can take them as an integral part of the narrative environment, which guided us through individual units, stations, characters and figures, bodies or exposed parts of the body in the dramaturgical arc and invited us to interact, touch, taste, and experiment. By coming to the exhibition, we entered an artistically marked environment and became part of a special procedural ritual, in various ways we were invited to a game that opened a free path to imagination.

The *Piggy bank for the artist* exhibition is formally no different and is also serial, except that the game has already taken place and the ritual has remained reserved for the artist. When Jože Šubic reveals this ritual with video films, it is difficult to choose its nature, even though the purpose is declared and the meaning is clear. Still, by juxtaposing material artefacts, broken piggy banks as a result of the action of destruction that we watch on the screen, and the process itself, from preparation to the final act, we can perceive the entire installation in a diverse and multifaceted way, also as a holistic work of art that does not build only from multimedia structure, but primarily underlines the artist's life story.

Jože Šubic is a self-dependent artist who has tried quite a few media and materials – painting and sculptural painting, sculpture and small plastic, copper, wood, ceramics – he added another dimension with the inclusion of video film and remains completely in its own context. His art is alive, on the border between reality and myth, materiality and illusion, parable and allusion. It is humorous and ironic even in its excess, disciplined in its structure, enigmatic in its conception and frank in its suspense, which now literally breaks the triangular canon of power-money-authority as a cliché that squeezes us by the neck and suffocates us, but we live in it every day, with no real exit. Obviously, one of the possibilities is that instead of the alternative love-peace-harmony triangle, 'self-destruction' remains as a declarative action that warns that the situation is untenable by showing what it really is. No pretense and embellishments.

Piggy bank for the artist with a mise-en-scène setting and a theme that is essentially heavy, cruel, raw, in the space of the gallery and in the context of the artist's retirement, literally dismantles art in the original wreckage, which is not the result of vandalism, but of art. An artist makes art. At the same time, these remains both express and remind of the past, they are a memory of art and a memory of charity, a memory of income and earnings. But there is much more to it. A (self) contribution to art and a donation to an artist are, of course, gestures of voluntary giving to an artistic act and offering a hand to close the circle. We must not only perceive them as a feedback loop of supply and demand in a material and materialistic sense, but we must take them primarily in a metaphysical, utopian or dystopian gesture. Jože Šubic reminds us of (his) art and reminds us that it is not easy to survive in such a society. Well, he succeeded. At least during the

formally active period. And then what? Can we also think about retired art when we think of a retired artist? He does not offer us this answer and we have to imagine it ourselves. Let it remain an enigma. Otherwise, there is no end in art, right...

– Peter Tomaž Dobrila

BIOGRAPHY

Jože Šubic was born in Maribor in 1958. In 1982 he graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in Ljubljana, where he also completed his postgraduate studies in painting in 1984. He works in painting, sculpture, object art, ceramics and graphic art. He lives and works in Maribor. He has received the Glazer Award twice (1992 and 2013), as well as the Lifetime Achievement Award of the ZDSLU (2020), and many other national and international awards. His works have been shown in over 200 group and solo exhibitions.